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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Fifty-eighth session

Summary record of the 33rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 14 June 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Sadi

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Combined second to fourth periodic reports of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (continued) (E/C.12/MKD/2-4; E/C.12/MKD/Q/2-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), replying to a question raised at the previous meeting, said that the Secretary-General of the Government was very careful to follow up on the Ombudsman's recommendations. A bill had been drafted that, once adopted, would make the Office of the Ombudsman eligible for "A" status accreditation by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

3. According to a 2015 survey, 22.1 per cent of the country's population lived in poverty. The most common reasons that people fell into poverty were unemployment or early school leaving. Efforts were being made to improve education levels among the poor, especially in families that suffered from intergenerational poverty. A number of active employment measures were being taken to combat poverty.

4. **Ms. Stanchevska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that there were two transit centres for refugees and migrants, with a total capacity of 2,000 beds. At those centres, migrants were registered and received medical assistance, food, clothing and personal hygiene products as they prepared to continue their journey. Those who wished to could state their desire to file for asylum in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Interpretation services into Farsi and Arabic were provided by the Macedonian Young Lawyers' Association.

5. Following the closure of the Balkan route, 87 persons now remained at the Gevgelija centre and 32 at the Tabanovce centre. Their freedom of movement was not restricted. The relevant institutions profiled migrants at border crossings with a view to improving capacity to deal with the large influx of migrants. Migrants were interviewed to determine whether they might be victims of human trafficking. All potential cases of human trafficking were referred to a special department established within the Ministry of the Interior to combat organized crime.

6. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that persons who had filed for asylum and whose case had not been decided within one year had the right to register with the employment agency. Persons who were granted asylum had automatic access to the labour market. There were currently 522 beneficiaries from subsidiary protection, most of whom were Roma from Kosovo, and they had the right to work and to access the health-care and education systems.

7. **Ms. Grozdanova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, according to national law, there should be no difference between the wages paid to men and those paid to women who occupied the same position. There was, however, an overall wage gap, due to the fact that women tended to hold lower-ranking positions than men. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was working to increase the capacity of labour inspectorates to inspect private companies in both rural and urban areas, as it was aware of possible wage discrepancies between men and women in the private sector.

8. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that a programme was in place to ensure equitable regional development in the country. In 2016, the Government had provided €5 million in funding for 400 projects proposed by municipalities. Development projects were also carried out through a cross-border cooperation programme that was largely funded by the European Union. Shuto Orizari, the only municipality with a Roma majority, had received assistance from the central Government to resolve its water supply and sewage problems.

9. **Ms. Jovanovikj** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, according to data from 2006, there were about 6,100 unemployed Roma men and about 2,200 unemployed Roma women in the country. While data disaggregated by gender was available on the various economic activities that made up the informal sector, there was no data to indicate its total size. The Action Plan for Reduction of the Grey Economy included measures to be taken by labour inspectorates to encourage the formal registration of informal businesses. A European Commission Twinning project was being implemented to deal with the matter of unregistered workers. A report on the situation would be issued as part of the project, and measures would be taken to amend the relevant laws if necessary.

10. It was estimated that 22.5 per cent of employed persons worked in the informal economy. A law had recently been adopted prohibiting informal work, with a view to combating tax evasion and price dumping. Since 2012, active and passive jobseekers had been registered separately on the basis of a statement from the jobseeker. Those who wished to change their status from active to passive or vice versa could do so by amending their statement.

11. In 2012, when the Law on the Minimum Wage had been introduced, it had been decided, based on input from employers, that it was necessary to set a lower minimum wage for persons working in the sectors of textile production, garment manufacture, leather processing and leather item production. That minimum would gradually be raised until it was on a par with the minimum wage established in the Law, and that should be achieved by 2018. The minimum wage had been established on the basis of tripartite negotiations between the Government, trade unions and employers' associations.

12. Pursuant to national law, an employer could dismiss a striking worker only in response to a strike that was already under way. That and other such provisions would be amended as necessary after a pending analysis of national labour laws by the International Labour Organization had been conducted. All workers had the right to a pension and compensation in the case of injury on the job, and their family members had the right to survivor benefits. The public health system covered employees, self-employed persons, foreigners working in the country and their family members. Health insurance was provided to unemployed persons, persons with an income below the minimum wage and persons over 65 years of age with no income.

13. Child benefits were available to all citizens and foreign residents with children. Provision was made for the transfer of pensions from other countries with which bilateral agreements on social insurance had been reached. To date, there were 21 such agreements, and 2 more were in the process of ratification. The amount paid in pension benefits was adjusted annually to bring it into line with the cost of living. Pensions were paid out regularly, at the same time, for all 308,000 pensioners. Participation in the pension insurance scheme had been obligatory for all employed persons since 1 January 2003.

14. A number of active employment measures targeted women in particular and, by law, at least half of the beneficiaries of any such measures must be women. New day-care centres and flexible working hours were needed to encourage women to join the labour market. Advisory services were available to women in rural areas to teach them to be more employable and competitive in the labour market.

15. Recognized refugees enjoyed the same labour rights as other foreign nationals with permanent residency, except in certain situations where there were restrictive measures in place against persons from a particular country of origin.

16. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, following legislative amendments, persons who received money transfers were no longer denied access to benefits in cash. The State labour inspectorate conducted inspections of all legal entities in both rural and urban areas to ensure that employers respected workplace health and safety regulations.

17. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was taking measures to get children off the streets and into school. There were four centres for street children in the country. The number of new registered cases of children begging in the streets had stood at 92 in 2014, 126 in 2015, and thus far only 18 in 2016. Reprimands had been issued to negligent parents in 41 cases in 2014, 72 cases in 2015, and 19 cases thus far in 2016. In a few cases, parents who failed to show due care despite the reprimand had been deprived of their parental rights, and in some cases criminal charges had been filed.

18. **Ms. Grozdanova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that efforts to establish a legal framework for preventing and protecting the victims of domestic and gender-based violence were ongoing. A number of shelters where victims of violence could receive assistance and support had been opened. Training on how to deal with cases of domestic and gender-based violence was dispensed to judges and prosecutors on a continuing basis.

19. The fact that the country had signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in 2011 and adopted general recommendation No. 19 on violence against women by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had paved the way for the enactment of a law to combat domestic violence. The law drew upon a number of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention and specifically addressed stalking and issues relating to parental rights. However, its overriding purpose was to protect victims of domestic violence while ensuring respect for their right to physical integrity and the principles of gender equality. Following its enactment, a number of government ministries had signed cooperation protocols defining their tasks and responsibilities in respect of protecting victims of domestic violence. Further protocols aimed at coordinating the activities conducted by State institutions on the ground had also been adopted. A multidisciplinary team had overall responsibility for overseeing the action taken under the law, while social work centres provided care and support to victims of domestic violence and perpetrators could receive psychological support at special counselling centres.

20. Statistical data collected by the Ministry of the Interior showed that, in 2015, around 2,100 complaints of domestic violence had been filed with the police and criminal charges had been brought in just over 1,000 cases. In the same year, social work centres had taken in around 1,100 female victims of domestic violence. Nearly 80 per cent of all victims of domestic violence in the country were women.

21. The measures taken by the Government to combat human trafficking included the establishment of a national commission and the introduction of a mechanism for the referral of victims of trafficking to the appropriate institutions. The legal provisions dealing with the appointment of a guardian for child victims of trafficking had been amended and day-care centres had been opened for those children and other victims of trafficking.

22. Social work centres employed social workers trained in identifying and assisting victims of trafficking. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had prepared a list of indicators to simplify that task and had also dispensed training to police officers, health-care professionals and foster families on how to care for such victims and facilitate their

social reintegration. A special programme for the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims of trafficking had also been devised.

23. **Ms. Stanchevska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, overall, there had been a decline in the number of sexual crimes, including cases of child sex abuse, recorded by the police and that the prosecution rate for rapes of vulnerable persons had increased. In the first quarter of 2016, six cases of rape, four cases of child sex abuse, two cases involving child pornography and one case involving the rape of a vulnerable person had been recorded.

24. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for registering and prosecuting sexual offenders while the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy ensured that victims of sexual abuse received the necessary care and support. In 2015, social work centres had assisted about 50 victims of child sex abuse. A protocol intended to coordinate efforts to address the situation of street children had been signed by several government ministries, social work centres and other institutions working with the children.

25. **Ms. Manevska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that research conducted by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund in 2011 showed that malnourishment was much more prevalent among Roma children and children living in rural areas than others, owing to their less favourable socioeconomic situation.

26. **Mr. Jovanovski** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government was not aware of any instances of Roma or other persons being evicted from informal settlements, and a significant number of applications for the legalization of such settlements had been received. There had, however, been instances of individual Roma being removed from public spaces for antisocial behaviour and from private property for trespassing. The Government did not collect statistical data disaggregated by ethnicity on the applications received and only a small number had so far been approved, on account of the requirement that architectural drawings of the informal settlement or property in question be submitted in order for it to be legalized, which was prohibitively expensive for the majority of applicants. However, the national institute responsible for land surveys had agreed to produce the necessary architectural drawings free of charge for all underprivileged families wishing to legalize their homes and the number of applications approved was expected to increase as a result.

27. **Ms. Manevska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government had amended the law on health care to allow the co-financing, with the private sector, of specialist training for doctors currently working in private health-care institutions, in an effort to overcome the serious shortage of general medical practitioners, paediatricians and gynaecologists in the country. To date, around 90 doctors had been recruited for specialist training through public competitions and deployed to public hospitals and clinics, where they would take up permanent positions upon successful completion of the training. The recruitment of qualified gynaecologists was a major priority. Once the doctors recruited had completed their specialist training, they would be deployed to rural areas where there had never been a gynaecologist and to the municipality of Shuto Orizari, where the majority of the population were Roma.

28. Expectant mothers received, on average, 10 antenatal check-ups from a gynaecologist. The Ministry of Health had launched a special programme for treating drug and alcohol addictions and related illnesses, under which drug users were offered substitution therapy in dedicated addiction treatment centres. Currently, 1,400 patients were undergoing methadone substitution therapy. There were also plans to introduce an electronic system to monitor their progress.

29. The Government planned to continue and step up the activities currently funded by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria when they came to an end and would make treating HIV and AIDS one of its top priorities, adopting a special budget for activities in that area.

30. The arrival of thousands of refugees in the country had prompted the Ministry of Health, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund, to launch a project aimed at increasing the availability and use of sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, in the most affected regions. There were plans to extend the project to the whole country. Condoms and contraceptive pills were distributed at the 10 sexual and reproductive health centres. The Government currently covered the cost of only one type of oral contraceptive but did not exclude the possibility of including others in the list in the future.

31. There had been a decline in the number of abortions performed following the entry into force of the new law on abortion. The commission of first instance was required to process requests to terminate a pregnancy within three days and a one-day deadline was set for the commission of second instance, to which the woman could appeal if her initial request had been denied. The vast majority of requests referred to the commission of second instance in 2015 and 2016 had been approved. No cases of illegal abortion had been recorded.

32. It was common practice for private health-care institutions to conclude contracts with the national health insurance fund for the provision of certain health-care services. Under such contracts, patients receiving secondary or specialized treatment at such institutions were required to bear part of the cost of treatment themselves. The administrators of the national health insurance fund were responsible for monitoring the compliance of private health-care institutions with the contracts concluded and conducted regular inspections to that end. Institutions found to be in breach of their contractual obligations were liable to a fine and, in serious cases, their contract with the national health insurance fund could be cancelled and they could be removed from the official list of health-care providers.

33. The National Public Health Programme required public health bodies to conduct a variety of preventive activities. An assessment to determine the nutritional value and quality of food and the safety of water, especially for the most vulnerable segments of society, was carried out on a yearly basis. The results of that assessment were then used to inform the measures taken by the Government to reduce the risks associated with substandard food and unsafe water. Regulations relating to the standard of food provided to children in nursery schools, primary schools and childcare institutions had been adopted in 2014 and could be consulted online.

34. In 2014, just over 60 per cent of the population drew water from urban water supply systems managed by public enterprises, which were subject to government oversight. The remainder drew water from either village wells or rural water supply systems. During the period 2002-2014, around 3 per cent of the country's water supply had been found to be unsafe. That proportion had since decreased to less than 1 per cent, signifying that the vast majority of the population now had access to safe water. Water quality was maintained by the 12 water purification stations operating in the country and data collected served to help further improve water quality. Moreover, a ministerial committee responsible for health and environment-related issues set up in 2015 oversaw the activities of working groups tasked with devising measures and policies aimed at improving the state of the environment and the country's health-care system.

35. The 10 public health centres around the country provided information, advice and counselling to young people in the area of sexual and reproductive health. In 2010, 10

clinics had been set up to provide support to persons wishing to stop smoking; the clinics had helped 494 people, 50 per cent of whom were health-care workers.

36. **Mr. Chupi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Life Skills curriculum included age-appropriate sex education and covered awareness of sexual abuse. The Government's education development strategies had increased the number of preschools, made secondary education compulsory, and introduced scholarships for children from Roma and other vulnerable communities. The Adult Education Centre had adopted a strategy for 2010-2015, and the higher education system had been aligned with that of the Netherlands. In addition, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System had been fully implemented, and careers centres had been established in universities. The introduction of quality evaluation mechanisms had improved ethics in higher education. Secondary schools and universities now used a national grading scheme, and a teacher training academy was being set up. The Vocational Education and Training Centre oversaw the Adult Education Centre in the accreditation of informal education programmes. The main driving force of the 2005-2015 education strategy, the Computer for Every Child programme, had been complemented by the introduction of electronic textbooks and video material. Work had begun on a new education development strategy for 2020, the first draft of which would be available by the end of July 2016.

37. A manual for teachers on basic professional competencies in inclusive education was being produced and, following a pilot programme, a new enrolment form for children with disabilities was being introduced in all primary and secondary schools. Under recent amendments to education legislation, primary and secondary schools had to form an inclusion team, consisting of special education teachers, psychologists and, where necessary, the child's doctor, for each child with disabilities. The Ministry of Education and Science had employed 103 new special education teachers to work with children with disabilities in schools all over the country, and intended to increase that number further. Municipalities were allocated double the usual amount of funding per child for each child with special educational needs. Every school now had a team for multi-ethnic integration, and the Ministry had set up a scholarship programme for vulnerable secondary school pupils. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was implementing a programme under which families who were receiving social benefits were entitled to additional funds if their children were in education. Under the Constitution and education legislation, all forms of discrimination were banned within the education system.

38. The Ministry of Education had produced a manual on non-discrimination against Roma students in the education system and had engaged two education mediators to work in 20 municipalities, where they would assist Roma families in enrolling their children in education and support Roma children in successfully progressing from one school year to the next. Tutorial support was provided for Roma children in primary schools to maximize their achievement. In 2010, the secondary school enrolment criteria had been lowered by 10 per cent to enable Roma pupils to access more attractive schools and 600 Roma children received scholarships each year. Roma children also received mentoring to support them in adapting to the school environment and tutoring towards the end of primary and secondary education to assist them in moving on to the next stage of education. Enrolment quotas were in place in higher education for Roma students, and the Roma language had been introduced as a non-compulsory subject at universities. In 2014, 79 per cent of Roma pupils had made the transition from primary to secondary education; that figure had increased by just over 4 per cent in 2015. No classes consisted solely of Roma children; however, there were schools where the majority of children enrolled were from the Roma community. That was also the case for other ethnicities, depending on the location of the school, because pupils usually attended the school closest to their home. Reports of parents refusing to enrol their children in schools attended by Roma children were incorrect; that had occurred in only one isolated case. At the request of NGOs, a specialist team had been formed to

determine whether children in special schools should continue to be enrolled there or could move to mainstream schools, in an effort to address the issue of the ethnic balance of pupils in special schools.

39. **Mr. De Schutter** asked whether, in light of the 5 per cent rise in inequality in the State party between 2002 and 2015, the Government was intending to re-examine its current tax regime. He would also be interested to know whether the Commission for Protection against Discrimination could be made more effective and what information schoolchildren were given on sexual orientation and gender identity. In respect of the labour market, the Committee would welcome information on the current situation with regard to the concept of equal pay for equal work, whether refugees and persons requiring special protection still faced obstacles in accessing employment programmes because they were unable to provide the required documentation and whether the delegation considered that the lower minimum wage currently in force in the textile and leather sectors constituted indirect discrimination against women. Lastly, was there any data to show what effect the threat of a €50,000 fine for doctors performing illegal abortions had on their willingness to perform legal emergency terminations?

40. **Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão** asked whether Roma women faced discrimination in public hospitals, particularly in gynaecology services and whether any up-to-date statistics were available on domestic violence.

41. **Mr. Martynov** asked whether people working in the informal sector, which had recently been made illegal, could still access social benefits and what percentage of unemployed people received unemployment benefit.

42. **Mr. Uprimny** said that he would be interested to know whether there was a monitoring mechanism to ensure that rights were respected equally in all areas of the State party and, if they were not, whether the central Government intervened. Did the State party intend to maintain the harm reduction programmes for drug users which had been financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and, if so, would they be developed in collaboration with civil society organizations? Further information should be provided on drug policy and, specifically, whether the policy on the criminalization of drug users would be changed and the obstacles to accessing health-care services faced by drug users who were minors would be removed. Lastly, what strategies were in place to deal with inequality and its effects on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights?

43. **Mr. Dasgupta** asked what progress had been made to reduce poverty in the State party, whether there was legislation to prevent doctors demanding bribes and, if so, how many prosecutions had been brought.

The meeting was suspended at 12.05 p.m. and resumed at 12.15 p.m.

44. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that great progress had been made in recent years in increasing the country's gross domestic product and the volume of foreign investment; therefore, while the tax regimes currently in place might be reviewed in the future, there were no plans to do so at present.

45. **Ms. Grozdanova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had set up a working group to study the Law on the Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination and make recommendations for its improvement. Although the Law did not contain any explicit reference to sexual orientation, the forms used to lodge complaints presented sexual orientation as one of the grounds for discrimination. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination had received 80 complaints the previous year; only one involved discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

46. As for statistics on the incidence of domestic violence, she said that, in 2015, about 1,000 criminal charges and 500 misdemeanour charges had been brought and more than 2,700 complaints had been filed with the police. According to information from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, there had been about 1,100 victims of domestic violence in 2015, of whom just over 40 had been referred to the shelters for victims of domestic violence.

47. Homophobia was indeed a problem in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, as in many other countries. The Ministry and the Commission were working to enhance the skills and capacities of professionals at the central and local levels, with a view to promoting respect for the rights of all persons suffering from discrimination, including those of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Training had also been provided to police officers, judges and social workers in respecting the human rights of all the diverse groups living in that country.

48. Although the Commission for Protection against Discrimination had prepared a protocol for the protection of persons subject to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, it was also working on all other grounds of discrimination listed in the anti-discrimination law.

49. **Ms. Stanchevska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that over 1,000 cases of domestic violence had been reported in the country in 2015 and 200 had been registered in the first quarter of 2016.

50. **Mr. Chupi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that sex education programmes in schools taught acceptance of sexuality, including sexual diversity, as a natural part of life, and emphasized the reproductive process. They also covered such problems as paedophilia and sexual abuse.

51. Full educational curricula had been developed for children from the Albanian, Turkish and Serbian minorities who preferred to be educated in their own languages during the primary school years. Roma children could also study their own language as of the third grade. There were language specialists and textbooks for all of those languages.

52. **Ms. Grozdanova** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, although there was no difference between the pay of women and men who did the same job, women continued to choose stereotypically female professions, which were lower paid, and therefore made less money than men. No complaints had been received from citizens about unequal pay.

53. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that any person with refugee status had the right to social and health services. There were about 500 Roma from Kosovo in that country who enjoyed all rights and were registered and permitted to work.

54. The 2012 Law on the Minimum Wage had resulted from negotiations between the National Economic and Social Council, the trade unions and employer associations; the Government had acted as mediator. The Government had not wished to create problems for the textile and leather processing industries; if a minimum wage had been made obligatory, many persons would have lost their jobs. It was understood that the minimum wage would gradually increase in line with the cost of living.

55. **Ms. Manevska** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the law on abortion had actually had a positive effect on doctors, who now felt safer. No charges had been brought against any doctors since the new law had come into force. Criminal charges had been brought in two cases involving illegal abortion. There were committees in all hospitals responsible for taking decisions in the event that an abortion was urgently needed. All women in the country were entitled to gynaecological care and there was no statistical

information suggesting that Roma women were subject to discrimination in gynaecological clinics.

56. Funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria for drugs-related projects would end in late 2016 and be taken over by the Ministry of Health. As for minors who were drug users, age was not an issue; young persons were cared for under the same treatment programmes as adults. In addition, their health care was covered under their parents' insurance plans.

57. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that public competitions had been held to recruit gynaecologists for the municipality of Shuto Orizari. The Government had also offered a salary supplement with a view to attracting doctors to the area.

58. The law against unregistered economic activities had been adopted in an effort to eliminate the informal sector, in which workers had no benefits or protection of any kind. The authorities conducted controls and inspections in order to identify unregistered businesses. Once those businesses were properly registered, the employees received all the usual protection afforded to workers. During the first year, the employer was exempt from paying social contributions for his or her employees. Employees entitled to unemployment benefits included, inter alia, seasonal workers, persons left jobless after bankruptcy, and persons laid off from their jobs.

59. Government funding for equitable regional development provided grants for municipal improvement projects. There were also municipal associations that administered project grants, once the viability of the projects had been assessed by the Ministry of Finance.

60. Turning to another question, he said that the sales tax had been grossly inefficient. The Government had therefore decided to introduce value added tax, which had eliminated tax evasion. Basic foods and medicines were taxed at 5 per cent; luxury goods at 18 per cent. In his view, that did not represent inequality. He did not exclude the possibility that a progressive tax scheme might be introduced at some time in the future.

61. Education was considered the most important strategy for the reduction of poverty. The motto "Education is power" had led to increased enrolment at all educational levels. Poverty had been halved since 2007, and now was at just over 20 per cent although, of course, more work remained to be done.

62. **The Chair** inquired how an asylum seeker survived during the year that he or she had to wait for permission to register with an employment agency.

63. **Mr. De Schutter** said that the Committee was pleased with the high-quality and transparent dialogue it had held with the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and was grateful for the information that had been provided. It was clear that the country was in transition, and often such transitions entailed the loss of rights. Growth, however, only strengthened economic and social rights if the fruits were distributed to the poorest sectors of society. Since 22 per cent of the population of the country was still poor, the Committee hoped that progress would bring an end to poverty. Culture and society were also changing and, in the Committee's view, the Government should set new cultural trends rather than follow them.

64. **Mr. Ibrahimi** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that asylum seekers were placed in centres until their applications were either granted or rejected; they were provided with accommodation, food, medical care and other services. Thanking the members of the Committee for their questions, he said that the country was indeed in transition; it had made great efforts to satisfy the membership standards of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and would continue on that path. It was

also prepared to work hard to honour its obligations under the Covenant and to fulfil the recommendations of the Committee.

65. **The Chair** said that the Committee had a much greater understanding of the situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as a result of the delegation's visit. He was pleased to note that the Covenant was a significant document for policymakers, legislators and the courts. The Committee was interested in the notion of passive and active jobseekers, and would reflect on it. It was unusual for new concepts to play a role in the dialogue.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.